

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – October 23, 2008

SF Contact: Tawal Panyacosit
(415) 274-6760 Ext. 316
tpanyacosit@caasf.org

LA Contact: Karin Wang
(213) 999-5640
kwang@apalc.org

ASIAN AMERICAN LEADERS & ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS CALIFORNIA UNITE TO OPPOSE PROPOSITION 8

*Across the State, Key Community Leaders
Seek to Correct Misinformation Circulating in Asian Communities*

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2008 - Today at press conferences in San Francisco and Los Angeles, Asian American leaders and organizations came together to oppose Proposition 8, a November 4th ballot measure that would eliminate the fundamental right for same-sex couples to marry. The Los Angeles press conference was organized by API Equality-LA and Asian Pacific American Legal Center and took place at the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy in Little Tokyo; the event was hosted by actor **George Takei** from the TV show *Heroes*. The San Francisco press conference was organized by Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA) and was held at CAA in Chinatown; it was opened by award-winning scholar and journalist **Helen Zia**.

In Los Angeles, speakers included California State Controller **John Chiang**; California Board of Equalization Chair **Judy Chu**; California State Assembly Members **Ted Lieu**, **Fiona Ma**, **Mike Eng**, and **Warren Furutani**; Loma Linda University Religion Professor **Julius Nam**; South Asian Network Executive Director **Hamid Khan**; Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council President **Dennis Arguelles**; and actor **John Cho** of the *Harold & Kumar* movies.

“Today, we come together as a broad cross-section of leadership in the Asian American community to oppose Prop 8, because it is dangerous to amend the state constitution to single out gays and lesbians and strip them of the fundamental right to marry. Such a move stirs memories of past marriage and immigration laws that discriminated against Asian Americans, and tried to legislate who we could love. We stand with the same-sex couples who deserve nothing less than the dignity and respect afforded the rest of our society,” said **Marshall Wong**, co-chair of API Equality-LA.

Community leaders present in San Francisco included California Board of Equalization Vice-Chair **Betty Yee**, California State Senator **Leland Yee**, San Francisco Assessor and Recorder **Phil Ting**, Asian Pacific Islander American Health Forum Executive Director Dr. **Ho Luong Tran**, Chinatown Community Development Center Deputy Director Rev. **Norman Fong**, API Wellness Center Executive Director **Lance Toma**, Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach Executive Director **Dean Ito Taylor**, and *Survivor: Cook Islands* winner and community activist **Yul Kwon**.

Speakers at both events countered misinformation circulating in Asian communities about the alleged impact same-sex marriage will have on schools and churches.

"As the brother of a pastor, I know how important religious freedom is and I can assure you that under no circumstances would churches be required to change their current policies," stated

California Assemblyman **Mike Eng**. "Contrary to misinformation that is circulating, no church in California is at risk of losing their tax-exempt status. If you truly believe in fairness for all Californians, then vote no on Proposition 8."

Speakers also addressed the parallels of anti-miscegenation and other discrimination against Asian Americans and the current battle to preserve marriage equality.

"Like so many Chinese Americans, my parents endured hardship and discrimination in raising their family in America," said California State Controller **John Chiang**. "How can we take away from anyone else the hard-fought right to raise a loving family and be free from the dangers of intolerance?"

"Chinese Americans were the subject of the worst discriminatory laws in California," declared California Board of Equalization Chair **Judy Chu**. "In fact, over 125 years ago, California passed a law to ban marriage between Chinese and whites, in order to deal with what they called the 'Chinese problem.' I find discrimination against the Chinese community offensive. I know that I do not want that same kind of marriage hysteria to be leveled against others in California. If I expect full and equal treatment to be given to me, then it is my responsibility to ensure that there is full and equal treatment for others."

"California remains steadfast in this latest march towards equality and justice for all," stated State Senator **Leland Yee**. "As voters, we must guard against future government-sanctioned discrimination by voting no on Proposition 8."

Both events visibly demonstrate overwhelming Asian American opposition to Proposition 8. The speakers were joined by other Asian American community leaders present at both events who also urged Asian Americans to vote "NO" on Proposition 8. Recently, Asian Americans have demonstrated their strong support for marriage equality. On October 15, 2008, an academic research team including UC-Berkeley, UC-Riverside and University of Southern California released a survey on Asian American voting habits. The largest-ever poll of its kind found that 57% percent of California's Asian American voters oppose Proposition 8. In September 2007, more than 60 Asian American organizations filed an amicus brief with the California State Supreme Court, arguing that California's laws should guarantee the same fundamental rights to everyone.

Community leaders at the San Francisco and Los Angeles press conferences encouraged attendees to visit the No on Prop 8 website at www.noonprop8.com to receive further information and updates on the campaign and its work to keep discrimination out of California's state constitution.

OTHER STATEMENTS FROM ASIAN AMERICAN LEADERS

Dennis Arguelles, President, Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council

"As Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, we have felt the sting of discrimination many times. In California, we were explicitly targeted the last time the state passed discriminatory marriage laws, barring interracial marriages. The state initially banned interracial marriage for Chinese, Japanese and other Asian groups. But after a court ruled in 1933 that Filipinos were not included on the original list, California quickly banned Filipinos as well. Because we have been the targets before, we believe it's important to support the lesbian and gay members of our community by voting no on Proposition 8."

Jay Chen, Board Member, Hacienda-La Puente Unified School District

"Proposition 8 enshrines discrimination into our constitution and stands against what our country was founded upon. The Asian American community has faced similar attacks in the past, from denial of citizenship, to segregation of schooling, to even the regulation of marriage. I urge our community to not forget the difficult path that has brought us to where we are today, and to reject the fear-mongering being used to justify discrimination – especially the unfounded fears about the impact of gay marriage on schools – and to stand firm on fairness for all."

Warren Furutani, California Assemblymember

"A vote 'no' on Proposition 8 means 'yes' to equality, 'yes' to fairness, and 'yes' to civil rights for all."

Reverend Dae Jung , First Congregational Church of Los Angeles

"The gospel of Jesus Christ speaks of the radical hospitality of God's kingdom where all are welcome to live in freedom with human dignity. I believe one cannot separate human rights from the faith we proclaim. Proposition 8 denies gays and lesbian couples their fundamental right to marry, which is one of the ways in which the human family enjoys the fullness of what it means to be whole human person. To deny them is to deny our humanity. And to deny our humanity is to deny the very message of faith that claims God's love for all."

Hamid Khan, Executive Director, South Asian Network

"Too often, gay and lesbian members of our communities face silence and punishment in their own homes due to their sexual orientation. We cannot and must not accept the exclusion of lesbian and gay people in our own communities. I am proud to live in a state that is currently committed to ensuring equality for all of its residents. Marriage for committed gay and lesbian couples is important because it ensures their ability to take care of one another and their families. We must protect their right to be treated fairly and vote no on Proposition 8."

Jane Kim, San Francisco School Board Member

"Proposition 8 is unconstitutional and mean-spirited."

Eun Sook Lee, Executive Director, National Korean American Service & Education Consortium

"Marriage is a right that must be extended to all community members. Proposition 8 takes us back to a dark historic period in our nation's history where the idea of "separate but equal" was commonly accepted. Let us not go back but forwards and embrace all community members, no matter their sexual orientation, and stand together for equality and justice. Let us protect our state constitution and show the country that California protects and accepts all community members."

Ted W. Lieu, California Assemblymember and Chair, Asian Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus

"Existing law in California prohibits the government from discriminating based on race, gender, or sexual orientation. These are the same laws that have protected minority communities, including the Asian Pacific Islander community. At the same time, nothing in the law prevents churches from continuing to maintain their own religious practices and policies. Proposition 8 would turn this fundamental distinction between the government and religion by elevating religious doctrine which opposes same-sex marriage over governmental laws that prohibit discrimination. That is wrong – we must remember that we live in a Democracy, not a Theocracy."

Julius Nam, Associate Professor of Religion, Loma Linda University

“By promoting Proposition 8, people of all faiths and religions are in danger of imposing their particular values and beliefs upon the general public, and thus violating the principle of separation church and state. Regardless of how you feel, you can vote to preserve the freedom to marry and maintain the dignity that comes with it for gays and lesbians in our community. Voting No on Prop 8 means you stand for freedom, fairness and compassion.”

George Takei, Actor and Activist

“My opposition to Prop 8 is deeply personal because it will not only take away my marriage to Brad Altman, my partner of 21 years, but it attempts to eliminate a fundamental right of all Californians to marriage equality. Prop 8 is a discriminatory barrier to the shining ideals of our democracy.”

Phil Ting, San Francisco Assessor-Recorder

“As a staunch advocate of civil rights, I support full equality amongst all couples. We have learned in our nation’s history that separate can never be considered equal and that each citizen must be treated equally regardless of their religious belief or sexual orientation. In my role as the San Francisco Assessor-Recorder, I am proud to validate every marriage license with my signature.”

Betty Yee, Vice Chair, Board of Equalization

“How can we as a society in good conscience discriminate against committed lesbian and gay couples who are heading up households and raising families in our communities? Instead of institutionalizing discrimination against them in our constitution, we should embrace them and accord them the same rights and benefits that heterosexual married couples have,” stated

###

API Equality-LA is a coalition of organizations and individuals who are committed to working in the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities in Greater Los Angeles for equal marriage rights and fair treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) families through community education and advocacy. www.apiequalityla.org

Founded in 1983, the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California (APALC) is the nation's largest civil rights and legal organization serving the Asian and Pacific Islander communities. www.apalc.org

Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA) was founded in 1969 to protect the civil and political rights of Chinese Americans and advance multiracial democracy in the United States. Today, CAA is a progressive voice in and on behalf of the broader Asian and Pacific American community. We advocate for systemic change that protects immigrant rights, promotes language diversity, and remedies racial injustice. www.caasf.org